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Core Advocate Training Information

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Author Note:

Paola Saucedo, Department of Collaborative Health and Human Services, California State University Monterey Bay. This capstone project was created with the support of CASA of Santa Cruz County to inform incoming advocates to be educated and inform them of what role they will be play as a CASA. Correspondence concerning addressing this article should be sent to Paola Saucedo, California State University, Monterey Bay, 100 Campus Center, Seaside, CA.

ABSTRACT

CASA of Santa Cruz County is a non-profit 501(c) 3 agency that trains and supports court appointed special advocates for foster children from newborn to 18 years of age. Advocates are volunteers who are required to go through thirty-five hours of core service training, and CASA offers four core trainings throughout the year. Volunteers are required to commit to seeing the child for two to four hours a week, for up to two years. However, every case varies in length, and at times a case may require additional hours per week and may go on longer than two years.

There are two hundred and seventy-two foster youth enrolled in CASA of Santa Cruz County, and foster children are not receiving the advocacy they need. As a result, recruiting and training new advocates within the department of the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) was implemented. Advocates receive standardized training from a trainee using Google slides. The purpose of the training is to educate and inform incoming advocates of what role they will be play in a foster child's life. CASA advocates determine the needs of the child, facilitate social services and community resources, advocate for the child's needs to be met promptly and thoroughly, and support system. Additionally, training would benefit everyone within the agency.

These slides can be updated with any additional information that needed. The slides can be evaluated for effectiveness by collecting and analyzing data for service learning outcomes. CASA of Santa Cruz County should continue implementing the slides for training incoming advocates as it is an important tool for the agency, but most importantly for those in the foster care system whom they serve.

Keywords: *Advocates, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), CASA of Santa Cruz County, Foster Youth, Training*

Agency Description:

CASA of Santa Cruz County is a non-profit 501(c) 3 public benefit agency located in Watsonville, California. It was founded in 1992, their office was located on the third floor of the former Watsonville hospital and was served by two staff members, eleven advocates, and fifteen children. In 2008, an intrepid board and staff launched its \$1.5M Capital "A Casa for CASA" Campaign to purchase a home to use not only as its office but primarily a place that looked and felt like a home where advocates could bring their children. In May 2009, the house was purchased, and renovations began. In 2010, CASA moved into the house. Since then it has become an extraordinary resource for children, volunteers, and staff. "It gives kids a vision of what could be in their future - a warm home," said Nancy Sherrod, CASA's former executive director. CASA is a child's voice in dependency court, providing advocacy, stability, and hope to children who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned.

Agency Mission:

CASA empowers volunteers to directly influence life-changing decisions affecting children in foster care. To accomplish this, CASA recruits, screens, trains, and supervises Volunteer Advocates who work one-on-one with children and youth in the dependency care system, advocating for their best interests in court, in school, and in the community.

Communities Served:

CASA of Santa Cruz County has trained over 1,500 advocates and served over 2,100 children between the ages 0 to 21 (CASA of Santa Cruz County, 2017). Their guidelines are to follow the rules of the state and local courts in addition to the rules of the National CASA Association; the rules are subjected to be annually reviewed and revised. The agency's values are to stand up, be the voice, and provide consistency for all those foster children. They are

advocating for the children to succeed and receive vital services (CASA Santa Cruz County, 2017). These volunteers advocate for the children's best interests. They use the information they gather to inform judges and others of what the child needs and what will be the best permanent home for them. This will not only bring positive change to the lives of these vulnerable children but also their children and generations to come.

Introduction/purpose/benefits:

Advocating is done nationally. Becoming a CASA volunteer is an investment of time, energy, and heart. According to CASA's Annual report in 2014 to 2015.

John Watts, a CASA advocate for Santa Cruz County, said "This is a child who has never been able to trust his own home, so he is always looking for someone to trust. That is one of the things I can provide for Andy" (pg. 5). Cindy Margolin a CASA advocate from Santa Cruz County also said "I'm not rich I never thought I could do something like this. But I could there's plenty to go around. Best of all, I can continue to support the good work of CASA when I'm gone" (pg. 6). Many people assume that you need to dedicate your entire life to becoming an advocate, but with just a few hours a week, you can make a difference for a child or teen in foster care. Iris stated "There was a lot of abuse in my home. I was fifteen when I was removed from my home and placed with a foster family. Unfortunately, my two siblings were placed in two different foster homes. In a little over two and a half years, I had nine different placements. When I was a sophomore, I was matched with Savanna, my CASA. When I first met Savanna, she said, "I'm here to advocate for you." I'm in a better place now, and with Savanna by my side, I'm moving forward." As an advocate, you will support them every step of the way, help them grow, and make a difference in their lives like Andy's, Iris', myself included and many others in the foster care system. This is not a sympathy awareness, in no form written to make

you feel guilty. It is instead a call to action to stand up and advocate for foster youth who have no voice in the eyes of the government. They are alone; this is why advocating is extremely important so that they don't end up being a part of a simple statistic in society. By becoming an advocate you will grow familiar with CASA staff, CASA volunteers, potential Donors, social workers, attending events, advocacy through broadcast (radio, television, and social media), and the community.

The purpose of this project, besides advocating for children with no voice, is to genuinely be that one person a child can truly count on and grow bonds with by demonstrating that they can trust someone who is not paid to oversee their welfare. My project addresses the lack of advocacy for waitlisted foster youth, addresses concern towards not enough advocates, and focuses on updating training information.

Problem definition/Contributing factors:

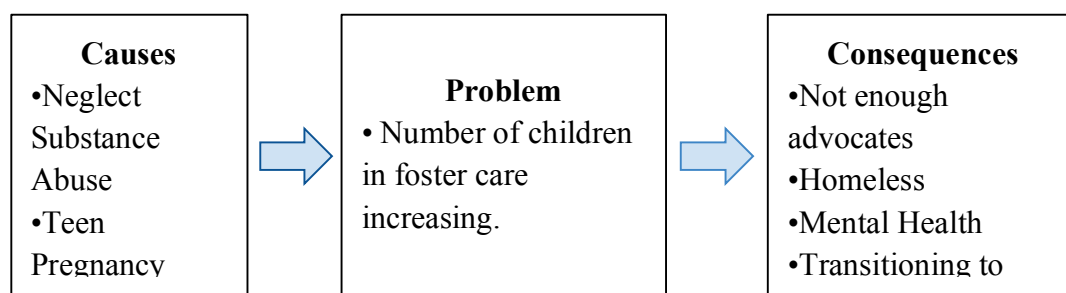
There are two hundred and seventy-two foster youth enrolled in CASA of Santa Cruz County and numerous others on the waitlist. Being on the waitlist does not necessarily mean that children are not being served. It simply means that they don't have a CASA. In 2015 there were 272 youth enrolled in the foster care system within Santa Cruz County from ages 0-21 (kids Data, 2015). As of 2017, CASA of Santa Cruz County has served a total of 283 children. There is also a total of 263 CASA members who advocate on their behalf and help support them through the issues they are struggling with (CASA of Santa Cruz County Annual Report, 2017). In 2015, there were 158 Hispanic/Latino children in the foster care system in Santa Cruz County (kids Data, 2015).

Children are placed in foster care because of society's concern for their well-being. Although being placed in the foster care system comes from concern of the child's previous

living situation, some experiences gained from being in the foster system can have a huge impact on a child's life. Some studies show a lot of foster youth kids experience neglect, abuse, trauma, and PTSD. Therefore, lack of advocates plays a big roll in the foster care system, especially when it comes down to identifying and regarding whether a child's current needs are being met. This report focuses on the lack of advocacy, positive influence, training, and foster youth who age out of the system. Those in foster care can benefit from having an advocate who support them and help them through their journey or with any issues that arise. Therefore, by having more advocates, especially male CASAs, give foster youth a role models who they can trust, and decrease the gap of advocacy for these foster youth.

As years go by, we seem to come across more and more current information that is beneficial to improve the lives of kids in the system. This ranges from an increase in guest speakers to former foster youth who share their experiences of having a CASA and how having that person who advocates for them impacted their lives. Also, it offers online courses as well as, PowerPoint presentations that can teach incoming volunteers on how to become an advocate. Those who age out of the system between the ages of 18 to 21, depending on their circumstance, can go down a dark road and even become homeless at some point if they don't receive the help they need. For this reason, CASA needs advocates who can teach them about life and transitioning into adulthood.

Problem Mode:



Description of the implementation plan:**Project Title:** Core Advocates Training Information

CASA currently lacks volunteer advocates. One of the main reasons why is because many people believe that being an advocate is time-consuming and trainings were not necessarily straightforward. Therefore, a new way of training is going to be in the form of a Google slide, It was created in November 2016 and implemented on May 1, 2018.

CASA Core Advocate Training Information “Google slides” was established in April 2018, halfway through the semester. Immediately after being granted this proposal, we began planning and working on designing slides which would demonstrate the role of CASA. In the first semester, we created Google slides that would be used for advocate training classes which was implemented on May 1, 2017.

In Spring of 2018, with the help of Outreach Recruitment manager Cita and Trainer Fred, we worked on putting every lesson that was in the binder, posters, and videos into slides. The lessons from the binder consisted of how to become an advocate and what you can and can't do when becoming an advocate. Also, what to expect when becoming an advocate and the work environment that an advocate will be exposed to. CASA currently has 13 active members who are helping with development and recruiting advocates, by having fundraisers and tabling. On May 1, 2018, the slides were ready for training, and on May 8, 2018, the incoming volunteers were using the new form of training.

Scope of Work and Timeline:

The main activities of this project included recruiting advocates to become a part of CASA and spreading the awareness to the community, as you see the scope of work located in Appendix A with more detail. Creating the CASA Core Advocate Training Information Google

slides was an idea that received significant support from staff members and advocates. To implement the project, at the beginning of last year there were only a few slides that were selected to be presented to future advocates at the time. These activities are done, due to my capstone idea being developed since last year. We've done a significant amount of work to move towards our event. During this past Spring Cita, Ana, Fred, and I worked on a master plan for the Fall and created more slides for Core Advocate Training.

During this semester I added additional slides due to new information. I made sure that every lesson from one through ten and videos were up to date, before the new training on October 24, 2018. However, before finalizing the slides and adding them into CASA google drive, I asked my mentor for her feedback so that I can make any other changes if needed.

Obstacles:

Like any other project, several obstacles may arise, without a strong and stable foundation, the project is more than likely to collapse. In this case, my concerns and challenges were that Google slides might not been successful as we anticipated. Also, not recruiting enough advocates. However, by have enough advocates, would the Google slides be successful? One of our main obstacles was trying to fit all the information from the binder and posters into Google slides and not recruiting enough advocates.

Project results

The only way of measuring the outcome was through our successful training, which will show us the number of new participants this pass training as seen in figure 1, this image will show us that Google slide was succeed. There was a possibility that we would have not meet some of our goals which was to recruit advocates to participate in CASA Core training, and Google slides won't be successful. However, it was not about how many advocate participate;

it's about those who are willing to make a difference in a child's life and be their voice. The type of approval needed for this event was through CASA of Santa Cruz. There were a few steps to be done such as paperwork, interview, training, and sworn by the court. All these terms need to be approved by CASA and the Court system.

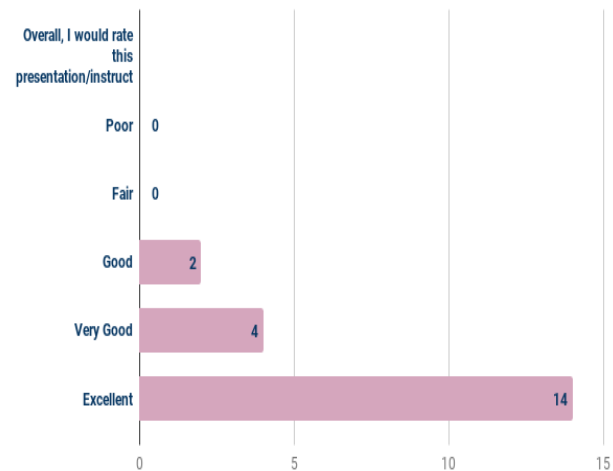
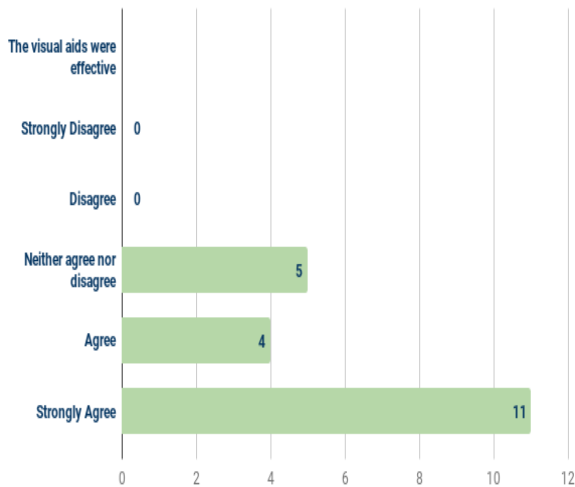
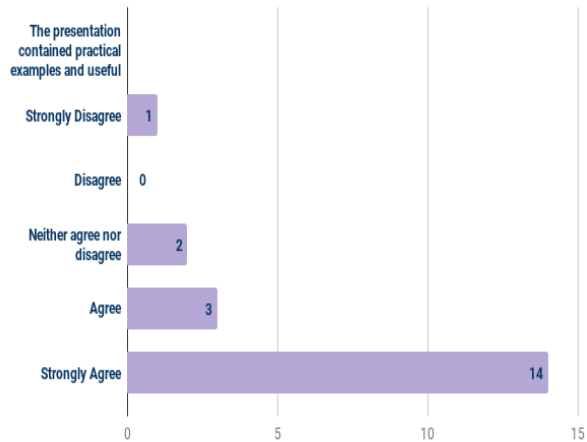
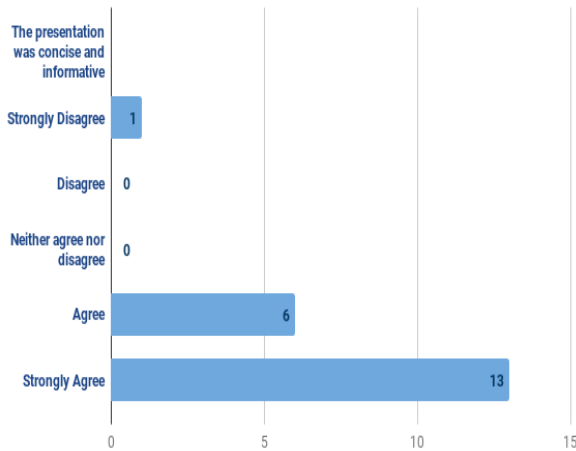
The outcome measures used to assess the effectiveness of navigating and updating new information into Google slides are first, observe and analyze the new information that can help advocates understand the latest information within the agency. In other words, the slides will be located in Google drive for advocates and future advocates to have access if they missed training or if they want to see any updated information. They can also, measure the awareness, make a change, enter new data, adjust status, or add more information to assist and educate advocates.

The second outcome measure was to observe Google slides notes. For instance, before each session, the might have new information to be updated for the next session, whether if its something new or interesting the trainee saw. The CASA trainee gathered all his notes, what he liked or disliked while using the slides during the training, so that changes could be made. His feedback has helped me view and make adjustments.

The third outcome measure is to verify that all the necessary information has been updated from lesson one through ten.

The last outcome measure was to create a pre and post questionnaire and graph the total number of new advocate who attended the workshop and see if they were educated throughout the training of Spring 2018, Summer 2018, and Fall 2018. The post survey is located in the Appendix B. Results of this pass training was successful as seen in Figure 1 with more detail.

Figure 1: CASA Core Advocate Training



Conclusions:

To conclude CASA has a lot to offer; however it does have some weaknesses, it lacks advocates, and there are children on the waitlist as a result. Recruiting will benefit CASA in engaging and educating advocates and those in the foster care system. That being said, we’re hoping that the PowerPoints are a success when training incoming advocates. By the PowerPoints being a success it would help out by encouraging others to volunteer. By collecting surveys will determine how efficient the PowerPoints were and what changes need to be made to keep progressing.

By donating time out of your busy schedule will help children and youth in Santa Cruz County. Advocating for children and youth has done so much and made some impact in their life, therefore join your local CASA and become a advocate in your county and make a difference in a child's life.

Personal reflection/final thoughts

As most project come to an end, I believe that that this project was built to inform new and continuing advocates to be informed and aware of new information that is being collected about foster children. The creation of Core Advocates Training Information has taught me to pay close attention to details when entering and updating information about foster children because there is so much important information one should know. Primarily, how to be consistent, work effective and efficient, and discover new ways to communicate with foster children and their case managers or those who are involved in their life. However, Core Advocates Training Information should be continued within the CASA of Santa Cruz County as it has helped formal and current CASAs. Additionally, Core Advocates Training Information is useful when CASA is in need of visual guidance to navigate a lesson.

Throughout my internship, I was able to discover a lack of advocacy within the agency. As a result, I attended a lot of outreach events and training classes, and I took resourcefulness to create a Google Drive so that current and future advocates can look at any time on new or updated information. To begin with, I covered over ten lessons to create Google Slides. Next, I categorized each lesson, handouts, posters, and videos. To discover that I collected data and analyzed information. After that, I decided to create a Google Drive so that advocates can have better access to documents or any updated information.

CASAs can continue the positive effect of my capstone project by recruiting more CASAs, especially bilingual advocates, as the agency is lacking advocates. Recruitment can be extremely beneficial for children.

As I look back at this whole process and amazing opportunity with CASA of Santa Cruz County agency, I can see that I have developed personal and professional skills that enable me to expand my learning abilities to help the underserved. The advice I would give to future capstone students working at my agency is to become involved with the agency as there is numerous collaboration. However as in any jobs, not all interns are cut out to be a CASA, but by having the opportunity to acknowledge the agency. Therefore when it comes the time to work on your capstone, don't be afraid to ask questions even when you find yourself lost and seek support. Last but not least thanks for taking the time to read my paper and GOOD LUCK.

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Appendices

Appendix A:

Scope of Work and Timeline:

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines
Small Projects: Event Planning, Outreach (tabling), and Office work (data information, filing, answering phones).	Talk with Cita, Fred, and Ana about tabling, event planning (educating and passing fliers to the community).	09/2016 12/2016
Create and plan CAPSTONE	Cita and Fred	11/2016
Google slides (Create lesson 1-10 slides)	Feedback from trainee Fred (transfer everything from the binder and posters into slides)	01/05/2018 05/10/2018
Small Projects: Event Planning (for CASA kids, Outreach (tabling), and Office work (data information, filing, answering phones).	Collaborating with Ana and Cita.	01/05/2018 05/10/2018
Create a survey for Octobers training	Collaborating with Fred and Cita.	04/19/2018 05/10/2018
Data Collection: Survey data.	Data (Collect data from CASA trainer Fred or Cita)	05/08/2018 06/27/2018
Analyze Data: Survey responses from June.	Analyze of the data	08/27/2018
PowerPoint: Adding additional information if needed on slides	Data (Update slides if needed)	08/27/2018
Small Projects: Event Planning (for CASA kids, Outreach (tabling), and Office work (data information, filing, answering phones).	Pass out fliers within the community (Primary & Secondary Mentor).	08/27/2018 11/30/2018
Analyze Data: Survey responses for October training.	Analysis of the Data (create a new pre and post survey)	09/01/2018 10/26/2018
Data Collection: Survey data.	Data (Collect data from CASA trainer Fred or Cita)	11/30/2018
Complete Capstone	Complete Capstone	11/30/2018

